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REV. DR. BETHUNE'S

ADDRESS.

ARTISTS' FUND SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA.

1840.

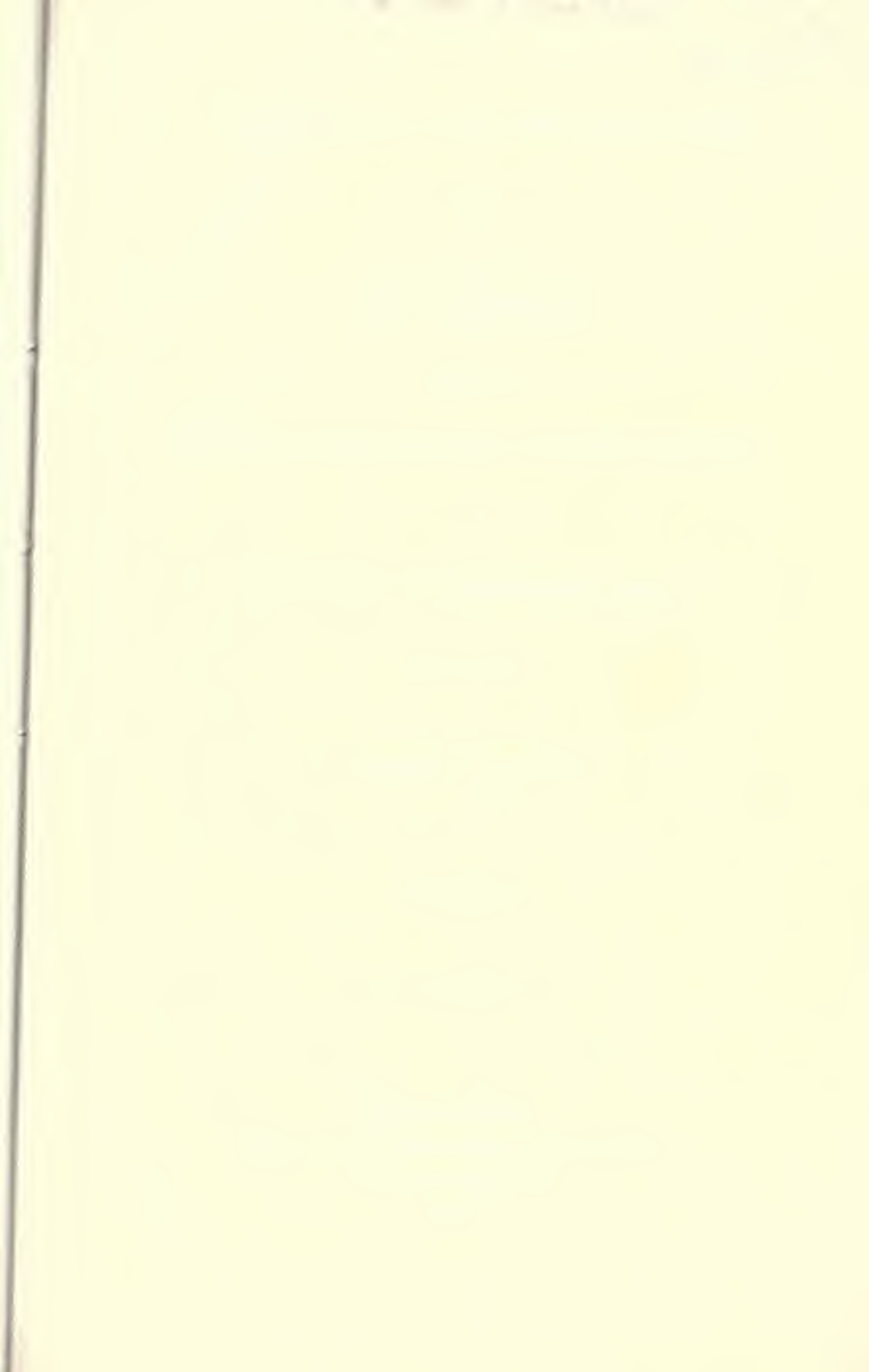
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*with respect-*

THE PROSPECTS OF ART IN THE UNITED STATES.

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AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

ARTISTS' FUND SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA,

AT THE

OPENING OF THEIR EXHIBITION,

MAY, 1840.

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BY GEORGE W. BETHUNE.

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(BY REQUEST.)

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PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED FOR THE ARTISTS' FUND SOCIETY,

By John C. Clart, 40 Dock Street.

1840.

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## ADDRESS.

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Mr. President,  
and Gentlemen, Members of the Artists' Fund Society.

I know that I express the feelings of many others, in congratulating you warmly on the prosperity of your Association. The opening of your new and commodious Hall of Exhibition, on a site very generously secured to you by the Academy of Fine Arts, with the rich collection of your own more recent and beautiful works now arranged within it, gives assurance of your successful zeal in the past, and warrants the best hopes for the future. You need no longer complain that you are without a resting place and home, and the scandal of seeming alienation between a Society of Artists and a Society of the friends of Art, has ceased. We now see that, though there may be different views of policy, a sincere desire to promote the healthful growth of Art, binds you together in a union, perhaps the stronger, because without a literal covenant. Kindness has been proffered, and kindness has been accepted. You have shown yourselves above that

petty pride which refuses honourable aid in a good cause; and the Academy have shown their willingness that you should be set before the public in a good light, even at the expense of being thrown themselves into the back ground. So close a neighbourhood, formed in such circumstances, cannot fail to be fruitful of good offices.

The fact, that, as associated Artists, you are conscious of sufficient strength to assume the entire management of your own interests, is, in itself, cheering. For if it be true, that since The Painters of Siena were chartered in 1355, under those admirable statutes for the government of the profession which, for truth and clearness, have never been surpassed, Artists have proved themselves to be the best judges of what the honour of the Arts may demand, it should also be remembered, that in their earlier infancy, they have always needed and sought kindly nurture from those who have the taste to admire, and the means to reward, what they have not the happy genius to execute.

It is not until the friends of Art have become numerous through the influence of Art, that Artists can be independent of the few. They must themselves form the general taste upon which they are to live, and that can be done only by constant and patient addresses to the public eye, in works of genuine merit. Taste is governed by sentiment, rather than professional dictation. You can neither

write, nor lecture us into a sense of Art; but your brush or chisel may win, when the best pen and most eloquent tongue can avail nothing. In illustration of this, how many a traveller from this western world, who, at home, listened incredulously to high-wrought descriptions of the great masters, has, in one hour spent between the Transfiguration and the Communion of St. Jerome, felt within him the birth of a passion for Art, lasting as life? But then again how very few, except the learned artist, practised critic, or observant anatomist, can enter at once into the merits of Michel Angelo? They may have studied the hundred volumes which have been written upon his works and genius; they may have conned by heart Sir Joshua Reynolds' lectures, and prepared themselves to exclaim, as the doors of the Sistine opened before them,

" Michel piu che mortel!  
Angel divino!"

but if any home-returned tourists, garrulous of foreign wonders and themselves, pretend that they fell into ecstasies on their first visit to the chapel, we need scarcely doubt that

"They talk of beauties which they never saw,  
And fancy raptures which they never knew."

We are willing to believe Michel Angelo the first of Artists, because that rank is given him by those

who are the best judges, and perhaps, in time, we might be educated into an appreciation of his greatness; yet, until then, it is a matter of faith. But when critics tell us of the mild glories of Raffaele, sublime in his serenity, or of Domenichino's touching truth, making the beholder tremulous with sympathy, we yield a ready assent, because we can feel them. Gentlemen, you must make us feel Art, and afterwards we shall be glad to hear from you homilies upon taste.

One good Artist sows the seed of a liberal harvest for many successors, not only by the encouragement of his example, but by the excitement which his works give to the public appetite for the pleasures of Art. Collections, such as you exhibit each season, made up from your various departments and styles, and thus addressed to our various taste and capacity to enjoy, must, as indeed experience has shown, call forth the latent love of many an eye and mind for beauty of form, colour, and composition. Some scene of quiet nature, with its bending trees mingling their shadows in the placid waters; or gorgeous landscape of rich autumnal hues, such as visit no land but ours; or sea piece, where the struggling vessel heaves and tosses on waves which foam around her, as the brush of Birch can give them action, will excite a desire that other spots, endeared by tender associations; or remembered view, which we lingered long to gaze upon and sighed to leave; or thrilling



incident of former adventure might be present, by the magic of your art, when the reality is far distant, or long since past. The marble, which, to an unpractised eye seems cold and inexpressive, from its polished pureness and classic severity, when wrought into the form and features of the great we revere, or the faithful we have cherished, will soon assert its power to give superior dignity, or spiritual tenderness, to memorials of virtue, loveliness, and truth. If the portrait of one dear friend speak to us from the canvass, how natural is the wish that graphic images of all who form the circle of affection should remain, when the grave shall have hidden their decaying dust? Filial piety will entreat you to trace the venerable countenance of the parent whose race is nearly run; the mother, to secure her a longer enjoyment of her child's infantile graces; and the husband and father, to combine for him in loving group his pleasing wife and circling offspring.

Fed by such grateful indulgence, may we not hope that a growing taste and liberality will learn to appreciate the noble talent of Epic composition? Then, instead of being content with hanging upon his walls mere family likenesses, which, however gratifying they may be to affection, the painter's skill can rarely invest with grace or dignity, the lover of his country and of virtue will seek to impress his own, and the young minds of his household, with scenes of American glory, and the attractive teachings of pic-

tured morals; admiring citizens will combine their gratitude, and place high upon pedestals of honour statues of our heroes and sages, inviting posterity to unite with them in doing homage to public virtue, and in learning lessons of patriotic devotion; and legislatures, representing a generous public spirit, warrant the employment of genius in giving majesty to halls of office, and elegance to resorts of the people.

It is melancholy to think of the talent which now lies dormant among yourselves, gentlemen, for want of encouragement; and to see in your annual catalogues such a repetition of "Portrait of a Lady;" "Portrait of a Gentleman;" when we know that some, at least, of the pencils which produced them are capable of far higher achievement. But in a country like ours, where there are no princely houses and few large fortunes, you cannot hope for great advances in the public feeling of Art, but by reaching the people generally. In the present state of political controversy (and there is little prospect of a speedy amendment) the expenditure of public money upon works of Art would expose the best administration to defeat from the virulent assaults and impeachments of opposing partisans, many of whom know better, but are willing to use any methods, however mean, of political advancement. The people would be persuaded by their sophistries, that nothing should receive the public patronage, but that which is imme-

diately and palpably useful; and that, contrary to the suffrage of all history, the Arts, which refine and beautify, are unworthy the regard of simple republicans. This prejudice, so fostered, can only be met among the people themselves, by a wide diffusion of Art in its cheaper forms. It might, with truth, be affirmed that the same statues which were the admiration of Athenian democrats, or now delight the houseless lazaroni of Naples, could not stand in our public squares without mutilation until to-morrow morning. There is brutality enough among us to count it a good joke to knock off the nose of the Medicean Venus, or decapitate the Antinous. Yet the love of Art is indigenous to no particular soil; nor is it inherently confined to any particular race. The child's pleasure in his picture-book, and the crowds which gather before the print-shop window, prove that there is an innate taste, which needs but to be cultivated to acquire force in any land. It is the habit of contemplating works of Art which, in the course of years, forms the public taste for Art. The decorations and symmetry of their public temples, and their public memorials of heroic deeds and ancestral glory, taught the Greeks to identify encouragement of Art with religion and love of country. Italy, before Grecian genius shone upon Etruria, was barbarous and blind; and the Roman, as he first appeared, was only stern and warlike. Even in the time of Augustus we read of no successful native Artist,

where, in more modern centuries, such glories of genius have shone; where now the roughest lithograph bears the stamp of merit, and the poorest peasant, crushed as he is by despotic rule, swells with the thought that the land which schools the world in Art is his own. The same change, despite of our Anglo-Saxon lineage, may pass over us, and with more than Grecian freedom, and ancient Roman valour, we may acquire the taste to feel that national character loses nothing of its dignity by being draped with grace.

Yet, I repeat, this can only be accomplished by reaching the mass of our people who must control the national sentiment. Modern improvements in Art furnish great facilities for this work of refinement.\* Those, whose means are too narrow to purchase original designs, can find a cheap, but delightful gratification from the engraver's art, so successfully cultivated by some of our own countrymen, among whom are estimable associates of your own. Engraving is the true child of Painting,

“Mater, pulchra filia, pulchrior;”

and with filial zeal does she advance her mother's honour. Indeed, the burin deserves far higher estimation, gratitude and encouragement, than we are wont to give it, for bringing within the reach of many, what must otherwise have remained the privilege of a few, and thus preparing the way for a

\* Appendix (A.)

wide-spread influence of higher Art. A good engraving of a good picture, in its effect on the mind, is incomparably superior to a painting of ordinary merit. It gives us the drawing, the shadows, the composition and air of the master, refining the eye and taste, perhaps the more, because the colouring is not imitated. If it be true, as a critic of the best rank has asserted, that a connoisseur in prints is more than half accomplished as a judge of painting, it must also be true that a general diffusion of good prints would secure a general relish for Art in its more elevated and original forms. The painter, therefore, should regard the engraver as his best friend, and one who, never aspiring to be a rival, is content to serve under his shadow for a humble portion of the larger profit and praise which he assists to win.

It is certainly most pleasing for the generous admirer of Art, and lover of human happiness, to think of the vast numbers, whom the ingenuity of recent years has admitted to a share in his enjoyments. The prolific family of Annuals, long after their feeble literature has ceased to attract, amuse and delight by their elegant embellishments the vacant hours of those, who have received those offerings of affection, and of the visiter, who awaits, beside their centre tables, the anxious toilet's slow delay. The very bullionist smoothes his brow while contemplating the bank note's graceful ornaments, and though lamenting that

“So fair

A promise should deceive th’ admiring trust,  
And be not what it seems,”

must confess that the vignette is worth something, though the security be never so doubtful. The invention of lithography, and the great advance in wood-cutting, besides the service they render to science, have enlivened with glimpses of Art the walls of many a humble dwelling, once poor and mean; and allure the tasteful school-boy through a flowery maze to orthography and syntax, which it required our utmost courage to approach, when the *aditus* to their mysteries was guarded by a frowning “vera effigies” of Noah Webster, unlike any possible thing but a nightmare realization of the nursery hobgoblin. The Penny Magazines, as they are published in Europe, (and I hope soon to be able to say in this country also,) carry to the poorest of the people, wood engravings of master pieces in Art, and specimens of natural history, which the most finished critic would not disdain to admire; and there may be as much heartfelt enjoyment in the evening circle of the poor man’s home, around a fresh-cut number of the weekly visiter, as an amateur can feel before a Corregio or a Claude. I have often thought that I could forego the pleasure of listening to Mozart’s best overture, for the sake of witnessing the delight dancing in the eyes, and dimpling the cheeks of a group of country children around a Savoyard’s hand-

organ, or some unwashed minstrels singing the songs of their far-off Rhine; but, I am sure that I never see an Italian cast-monger staggering beneath his load of Graces and Napoleons, Tuscan vases, Walter Scotts and Dianas, without wishing him well as an unconscious missionary of Art, come from his sunny land to minister pleasure to the lowly, and refinement to the rude; for, though the moulds, from which they are taken, be worn and old, his casts yet retain something of the stamp of genius, and give sufficient gratification to excite a wish for more. The lithographs may be rude and gaudy, cinerary urns be turned into flower vases, goddesses made to hold candles, and cross-legged Cupids to read little books; but you will rarely find, in a humble family, a taste for these ornaments unaccompanied by neatness, temperance, and thrift. They are like the cherished plants in the window, the green creepers in the yard, or the caged singing-bird on the wall, signs of a fondness for home, and a desire to cultivate those virtues which make home peaceful and happy.

But, gentlemen, independently of benevolent considerations, we must not allow ourselves to despise such methods of Art, because we have been educated by fortunate circumstances, or inspired, as you are, by a more fortunate genius to perceive its higher beauties. It is chiefly from them, that we must hope for the awakening of a national taste. The ancient states where Art most flourished, were small in territory.

Every citizen of Attica could look often upon the glories of the Parthenon and the Pœcile. The temples of Elis, of Delphi, and the sacred Delos, and even the desert shrine of the Lybian Ammon, attracted vast crowds of religious pilgrims. The various public games brought together the most generous youth and sage elders, not merely to engage in exercises which displayed the finest forms in the finest attitudes, but also to enjoy the poet's noblest lays, the painter's best pictures, and the sculptor's most finished works. The aristocratic forms of Europe call around the sovereign in his capital those who represent the wealth and power of the nation, and it is both policy and pride which employs Art to give magnificence to abodes of authority, and to cover with grace the deformities of oppressive rule. Our people, on the contrary, are widely scattered. We have, and can have, but few great cities, and none of general resort. The country, in national questions, must rule the town. Large wealth can rarely be acquired, and yet more rarely be transmitted to a third generation. Happily for our liberties, the political power must remain with those who are not beyond the necessity of personal toil. As, therefore, the influence of the pencil and the chisel can reach immediately but few, the many are to be sought out by means which admit of greater multiplication and wider extent. Yet we may believe, that if our people could have placed before them such cheap exhibitions of Art, and were



at the same time made acquainted with the estimation in which Art was held by the ancient republics, and the best minds of all ages; the glory with which it has invested nations; the patriotism it has inspired, and the lucrative advantages it has secured; they would become as distinguished for a generous taste, as they are for a love of freedom. Obscure genius, which might otherwise have died unknown in some distant forest hamlet, may be called forth and encouraged into successful vigour, as was the talent of young West by a few engravings of Grevling. Each new aspirant after the distinctions or pleasures of Art, would be a centre of new influence over the minds of others. We should learn to have a grateful pride in the praise given to American Art abroad, and desire to wipe off the dishonouring imputation, that American Artists must go abroad to obtain a just appreciation. Thus, in time, the sentiment would become so general and so strong, that the scholar who records our country's story; the painter who illustrates its grand events; the sculptor who perpetuates in undying marble the forms of our mighty dead; the orator whose glowing arguments persuade us to the pursuit of their examples; the poet whose bold minstrelsy animates our patriotic ardour, and the architect, whose genius sheds venerable grace over our shrines of devotion, our seats of learning, and our halls of authority, (showing us, as in a constant parable, that stability ever resides in strength

combined with harmony,) shall be deemed worthy to share the high regard of their fellow citizens with the warrior who sheds his blood, and the statesman who devotes his far-sighted wisdom for their country's welfare. He, who preserves and blesses his country in peace, is certainly equal to him who fights for it in war; and he, who inspires or increases a reverence for laws, to him who writes and prescribes them.

There is very great reason to believe in the future success of Art among us. Our people, when excited in any pursuit, allow no limits to their enthusiasm, and have shown themselves inferior to none in variety of genius and courage of enterprise. Hitherto their attention has been compelled to engagements of more immediate usefulness, by the necessities of our new confederacy and numerous state governments, the rush of our increasing population, the wealth hidden beneath our original forests, the facility afforded to manufactures by the rapid descent of many a broad stream, the desire of bringing distant points nearer together, and of interlacing our interests by rail-roads and canals, and the agitation of many questions in finance and political morals, which have never arisen elsewhere, but must be decided by us. Yet how great have been the honours already attained, I had well nigh said compelled, from the world? The name which, by the unanimous suffrage of mankind, stands highest on the roll of uninspired

humanity, is that of Washington. He who, since the day of Newton, has given the strongest impulse to the application of physical science, made his bold experiments on the lightning of heaven from the plains near our own city, and sleeps beneath his modest tomb in a corner of Christ Church burial-ground; whither the stranger from every land, and the dweller in his own, turn their pilgrim feet to do honour to the memory of the Yankee adventurer, the apprentice printer, the poor man's honest counsellor, the Philadelphia editor, the American statesman, the baffler of European diplomacy, and the philosopher who taught the world. The authority of Marshall and Kent receives reverence from every great and just tribunal. Improvements in jurisprudence made among us, and especially within our own state, have been the basis (unacknowledged but not the less real) of extensive judicial reforms in that very country which claims to have taught us all we know.\* The name of Irving is already coupled with that of Addison; and in a single day, as it were, Prescott has risen to take his place with Gibbon and Hume, while, for truth of narrative and benevolence of feeling, he is above them both. The genius of Bowditch burns brightly near the compass and the quadrant of almost every bark that tempts the trackless ocean. The mighty energies of steam, first successfully applied

\* Appendix (B.)

to navigation by our own Fulton, now speeds the flying car over the rail-ways of Europe, controlled and directed by the superior ingenuity of American skill. The exquisite invention of Daguerre, recent as it is, shall soon be returned to him from this western world, stripped of half its mechanical arrangements, and capable of a more ready and useful adaptation. These instances, snatched at random from a multitude, prove that there is among our people a boldness and originality of invention, which cannot fail to secure great success in the liberal arts, when more favourable circumstances demand their more zealous cultivation. Even now the catalogue of American Artists must be regarded with great respect when we read upon it such names as those of President West, Copely, Stuart, Allston, Newton, Harding, Cole, Greenough, Inman, and others,\* of whose talents my inferior knowledge will not permit me to pronounce an opinion, or whose modest worth I must not cause to blush, even by just praise, when I see them present.

The Arts, indeed, have made surprising progress in the United States, when we consider the temptations which opportunities of wealth and political distinction offer to men of genius, and the poverty of reward, whether of honour or gain, which our countrymen have had the leisure or means to bestow

\* Appendix (C.)

upon them. In none, perhaps, is this more apparent, than in the noble and useful art of architecture. Mr. Verplanck, in his admirable discourse before the New York Academy, at the opening of their exhibition in 1824, quotes the strong language of Mr. Jefferson, that "the genius of architecture seems to have shed its malediction over this land;" and the accomplished friend of Art, confirms the sentence. But since that address was delivered, a change has passed over us, and the power of the curse has been greatly diminished. The simple grandeur of the Doric, the feminine dignity of the Ionic, and the leafy grace of the Corinthian, as they have been presented to us by the labours of those of our countrymen, who have gone back through ages of barbarism to find masters in the Grecian schools, have already done much to win us from our childish fondness for modern frippery. A few noble buildings (especially I may say, some which adorn our own city and its neighbourhood,) have given a widespread influence to a better taste, and the ruling desire is now evidently for the pure, rather than the showy. It is true that our means or our spirit have not as yet warranted the erection of many massive structures, but we begin to see on every hand the well proportioned pediment, the harmonious façade, and interiors studiously correspondent to the external style. Perhaps our imitation of ancient models has been even too strict. There must be, in the end,

more adaptation to our climate and peculiar circumstances. If we are obliged to make Egyptian buildings several stories high, we certainly are not obliged to confine the ornaments to the eternal scarabæus, a most unseemly emblem of a false mythology; nor in copying the lines of a Grecian temple for a Christian church, need we insist upon retaining the attributes of the heathen god. The ancients were never guilty of such mistakes. There was an intellectuality in their architecture, which always expressed the purpose of an edifice, not only in its general structure, but in the most minute decoration. They never built a temple of Plutus in the noble style which enshrined the Olympian Jove, or a shrine of the virgin Minerva in all the florid luxuriance which the Corinthian goddess loved so well. The vine-wreaths of Bacchus were never seen on the gates of Diana, nor the peacock of Juno, where the doves and sparrows of Venus should have sported. But such incongruities (in remarking upon which I may seem hypercritical,) will soon be avoided. Nice imitation of faultless models is the best study for our infant architecture. After the mind is filled with pure ideas, and the taste refined by conversation with perfect forms, we shall be better prepared to combine, adapt and invent.

The Gothic order, that wonderful combination of solemn grandeur with luxuriant tracery, which

astounds and enchants the American traveller in Europe, as he treads the aisles of time-worn cathedrals and crumbling cloisters, can never be established among us, at least not until we build merely for the sake of building. The gloom of the dark ages, in which it arose, has passed away. Our churches are now the abodes of clear truth, not of oppressive mystery; places of lowly and glad worship, not of long processions and pompous display. The Grecian styles suit our religion far better. The false poetry of "a dim religious light" does not agree with our faith in the God of love, who lifts upon his people the smile of a father's countenance. To one who has visited "Fair Melrose," "Fairy Roslin," the Seventh Henry's Chapel, the sublime Yorkminster, the ruins of ancient St. Joseph's at Glastonbury, or the magnificent cathedrals and bell towers on the continent, there is not a Gothic building in our land that does not look a puny and ridiculous abortion. Yet candour must admit, that our recent ecclesiastical buildings, after the Grecian models, promise a far better taste and propriety than the modern churches in our mother country. The high-backed pews; the inconvenient and meaningless recesses by which the church is tortured into the shape of the cross; the gloomy windows, granting little light, and less air; the tub-like pulpits, in which the preacher suffers like another Regulus, and the dizzy galleries, where the

people look like swallows on the house-top, have given place to arrangements, which enable all to see and hear and worship without doing penance.

It has been objected to us, that we use inferior materials, such as wood and stuccoed brick, instead of stone and marble; and it were well if we could afford to employ the more massive and durable; but certainly any thing is better than red brick and glaring free-stone. It is not an improbable theory, that the pines of Thessaly, and the oaks of Dodona in Epirus, gave the Greeks their first ideas of tall columns and massive pillars, as the interbranching of the Druid groves taught the Gothic arch. The architrave, the triglyphs and metopæ, are memorials of the use of timber before the quarries of Pentelicus were opened. Why may we not hew our stately trees until we are able to copy them in laborious stone? Why may we not face our bricks with composition until we can do more than imitate the Romans, who *faced* them with marble? Colour and form are far more important than material. I am grateful to every citizen who relieves my eye by painting his house any hue but red, provided he do not choose a tawny yellow.\*

Encourage yourselves, gentlemen, in all your departments, by this rapid growth of taste in architecture. It assures you that your countrymen have an

\* Appendix (D.)



eye for proportion and purity, to which no art of design can long appeal in vain.

Our strong national enthusiasm in favour of every thing American, is another sure ground of encouragement. We have often carried this to a ridiculous excess; but it is an amiable and honourable characteristic that we long to stand well in the opinion of the world; nay, it is a philanthropic wish, which prompts us to recommend our free principles for universal adoption. It is, indeed, mortifying to read the extravagant praise lavished by kind-hearted critics upon every person and every thing that appears before the public. If Cicero were to arise from the dead, and pronounce an oration before us, he would be obliged to share epithets with every fledgeling lecturer, or electioneering declaimer. The anonymous filler up of the poet's corner in a daily newspaper, always sings like Homer, but

“Never like him nods.”

A surgeon cannot set a broken finger, or a physician administer a bolus, but the grateful patient proclaims him a very Aristotle or Hippocrates.

“He beats the deathless Esculapius hollow,  
And makes a starveling druggist of Apollo.”

We have clever men undoubtedly. We have had, still have, and shall have great ones. But all the

Romans were not Fabii; and black swans are rare as ever, except in New Holland. Even American humanity must have some pigmies, if it be only for the sake of showing off our giants by the contrast.

Such injudicious encomium has an especially mischievous effect upon the young Artist. He is peculiarly sensitive of public opinion. I will not say that he belongs to

“ A simple race, who waste their toil  
For the vain tribute of a smile;”

but he feels that it is not enough to cry with the Pisan before his own works, “ Bene! Bene!” without an echo to his exclamation. It is the hope of praise which cheers him in his lone and enthusiastic toil; and, if praise be withheld, his genius droops the wing and dies. It is most unkind to feed this generous appetite into morbid extravagance, as unkind as it was in that populace who smothered their patriot with the robes they heaped upon him for his honour. Chiselling a head, without a model, from a rough stone, does not make a Phidias or Thorwaldsen; painting one fair face, a Titian or a Guido; or copying a landscape, a Salvator or Poussin. Long study and learning, the abandonment of many a habit, and patient failure, were necessary to raise even the best masters to deserved eminence. Raffaele learned from Masaccio. The Artist, even when he finds the flattering unction most sweet, knows that there should be some

extraordinary merit to deserve it. He becomes impatient of a slow and sure progress, and is sadly tempted to substitute eccentricity for boldness; glare for brilliancy; or dark confusion for depth of shadow. He varies his pursuit, and, forgetting the maxim, "Non omnes omnia," undertakes to excel where his genius does not lead. All this, the more prudent and experienced among you know well, but a word of caution may not be lost. Let us all remember, that the truest friendship is that which points out faults with kindness, and praises with faithful caution. We learn best from those who tell us when we are wrong. The most ignorant can thus teach something, as the cobbler who criticised the shoe of Apelles, or an indignant laundress, who protested that she never washed the shirt with which Jarvis had indued her master.

There is a fault in our country, now less rarely met with, of condemning without measure or exception, every thing American. It is chiefly to be found among those who return

"from foreign tour,

Grown ten times perter than before;"

too good to be plain republicans, after having uncovered their heads to royalty, or stood within the threshold of an aristocratic ball room; who can talk of nothing but dinners at Very's; ices at the

Café de Paris, or green oysters at the Rocher de Cancale; who have either not mind enough, or not heart enough, to love their own land above all others. These men will pass through your exhibitions, "naso adunco," full of scraps from foreign languages, and abusing, by misuse, the terms of Art, give you to understand that, in their opinion, nothing which you can produce, is worth looking at by one who has seen the Buckingham Gallery, the Louvre, the Vatican, or the Bourbon Collections. They will often parade upon their walls miserable dark daubs, imposed upon them by scheming picture dealers, as works of the old masters, but cannot think, for a moment, of buying an American picture. Heed them not. The true lover of Art sees some beauty even in an inferior picture, and can detect a latent power in the new and nameless pencil. He must prefer the best; but, as a critic and a patriot, he will acknowledge the good if a countryman has produced it; and, for Art's sake, he is sure to encourage merit, however slight it may seem at first to be. There is, for instance, a sign of a horse in Market street, which I often see in my walks; faulty it may be, in many particulars, and injured by exposure to all weathers, and yet, I venture to assert, that one who can look at it without some degree of pleasure, would scarcely enjoy Paul Potter's bull.

Notwithstanding these opposite errors, we may rely with confidence upon our strong sense of national reputation for the support of Art. Let it be shown

by your skill and devotion, that the Arts do embellish and exalt our country, and they shall receive a grateful return of reward and honour.

It is well for those, who have sufficient wealth, to bring among us good works of foreign or ancient masters, especially if they allow free access to them for students and copyists. The true gems are, however, rare, and very costly. A single masterpiece would swallow up the whole sum, which even the richest in this country would be willing to devote in the purchase of paintings. I hope, however, soon to see the day, when there shall be *a fondness for making collections of works by American Artists, or those resident among us.* Such collections, judiciously made, would supply the best history of the rise and progress of the Arts in the United States. They would, more than any other means, stimulate Artists to a generous emulation. They would reflect high honour upon their possessors, as men who love Art for its own sake, and are willing to serve and encourage it. They would be gratifying in a high degree to the foreigner of taste, who comes curious to observe the working of our institutions and our habits of life. He does not cross the sea to find Van Dycks and Murillos. He can enjoy them at home; but he wishes to discover what the children of the West can do in following or excelling European example. The expense of such a collection could not be very great. A few thousands of dollars, less than is often lavished upon the French plate glass and lus-

tres, damask hangings, and Turkey carpets, of a pair of parlours, (more than which few of our houses can boast) would cover their walls with good specimens of American Art, and do far more credit to the taste and heart of the owner. Rich furniture, to say nothing of the bad taste of crowding it into such petty apartments, is little better than a selfish and rude ostentation of wealth, to excite the envy of guests; and it is not in human nature to think better of others, who insist upon showing that they are richer than we. Riches, though they gain, for obvious reasons, outward deference, when they are mere riches without taste or refinement, are always secretly despised, and their possessors are, in the judgment of the world, like vile pottery upon which gold has been wasted in useless gilding. There are those, who cannot look upon a mirror without seeing within it a beautiful picture, dearer to their eyes than any other upon earth; but many of us would prefer a landscape by Coles or Doughty, to any such personal reflections of ourselves; and care little whether we trod upon Brussels or ingrain, sat upon velvet or hair cloth, if we might, by the kind bounty of our entertainer, enjoy the genius of our dear native land. It has become, I am told, unfashionable to put pictures upon the walls, except it be in a gallery, which few can afford to have. If so, it is a bad habit, which should be amended; a habit which must lower us in the scale of true refinement, and greatly impede the progress of true taste.

Our national enterprise, in pursuit of wealth, will also serve the cause of the liberal arts, when their value is better understood. A large portion of the population of Italy, and other countries of the old world, live upon the Arts alone; and our Artists, if properly encouraged, would, instead of being compelled, as many of them are, to reside abroad, induce the flow of wealth, the rewards of their skill, into their native land. There can be no multiplication of wealth so great as that which may be secured by the application of colours to a sheet of canvass, of the chisel to a block of stone, or of the graver to a plate of copper, when directed by the hand of genius. The colours which combined to make a masterpiece, now worth a prince's revenue, were originally purchased for a few dollars. A slight etching, by Rembrandt, sold at auction, a few years since, in London, for a hundred and twenty guineas; and the late William Carey, whose zeal for the Arts expired only with his life, asserts, in his Address to your Association, that the copper plate on which Woollet engraved West's Death of Wolfe, produced a gain of not less than fourteen thousand pounds.

The influence of Art upon necessary trades and manufactures is very valuable. The more graceful forms are ever the more simple, useful, and even economical; and the most common articles of household service may be profitably modified after the lines of a true taste. It is the taste displayed in the colours

and patterns of calicoes and gingham, which urges their sale more than any comparative excellence of the fabrics; and the country girl, who chooses her holiday dress, does an unwitting homage to the same genius the amateur admires in the finished picture. The cabinet maker, who judiciously copies most from the antique, will find the most ready demand for his furniture, even from those who never dream of being indebted to liberal art; and many an industrious mechanic, who has spent hard labour upon good mahogany, and wonders why his ware lingers upon his hands, might find the secret of his ill success in a disproportioned panel, a stumpy column, or a spindle leg. It is well known, that skilful Artists are employed by the manufacturers of useful articles in Europe, to suggest their forms and embellishments. Wedgwood, a Staffordshire potter, secured an unrivalled pre-eminence for his earthen-ware, by his fortunate engagement of young Flaxman to model his vessels. The Artist, thus introduced to notice, afterwards became the most gifted and spiritual sculptor of modern times; but not before he had made the fortune of his early patron, and improved the trade of England immeasurably; so that it may with truth be said, that the same genius, which has illustrated the sublime Homer and the pure Euripides, turned the clay of Staffordshire into more than gold. Our manufactures need such an influence from Art more than any thing else, and a liberal and far-sighted patronage of



Artists would soon render it unnecessary, in the judgment of all, to strain the constitution for the enactment of protective tariffs.

But we may look for the success of Art in the United States to higher causes. The remains of Puritan severity, and Quaker stiffness, with the incessant demands upon our enterprise, made by the circumstances of a new country, have not been favourable to the development of genius among us; yet enough has been seen to show that our people have a strong sense of poetry and eloquence. We have very few great poets, but we have very many whose artless fingers draw sweet and glowing strains from the lute and lyre. Our scenery, our noble rivers, rushing streams, limpid lakes, wild cascades, deep forests, gorgeous sunsets, clear atmosphere, and autumnal variegation, with the high aspirations which freedom awakens in every generous bosom, give us all the thoughts of poetry. The power of expressing thought in rapid and energetic language, is an American characteristic. To say nothing of the high eloquence which is heard in our legislative halls, our courts of justice and our pulpits, there is scarcely a man among us who cannot rise, upon a fitting occasion, and harangue in good set phrases. Our 'prentice mechanics meet at the close of the day's labour, to cultivate their talents in essays and debates. The crowds which have thronged this hall,\* and other places of

\* The Hall of the Musical Fund Society.

assemblage throughout the whole country, to listen eagerly, and with no small discrimination, to multitudes of clever orators, for years past, demonstrate a general appreciation of eloquence. What is Art but another form of poetry and eloquence? When do we feel the power of the bard or of the orator most? Is it not when he brings the idea he would impress, fully, as in a picture, before the eye of the mind? Phidias assured his countrymen that Homer was his master; and we can never enter as deeply into the spirit of the great tragic writers of Attica, as when we behold their thoughts made visible in the designs of Flaxman. Who that has looked upon the statue of the Dying Gladiator, but has felt the power of the sculptor and the poet to be of kindred source, when he remembered Byron's picture of the same victim!

“ I see before me the Gladiator lie;

He leans upon his hand, his manly brow  
 Consents to death, but conquers agony,  
 And his droop'd head sinks gradually low,  
 And through his side the last drops ebbing slow,  
 From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,  
 Like the first of a thunder shower; but now  
 The arena swims around him; he is gone,  
 Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hailed the wretch who won.

He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes  
 Were with his heart, and that was far away;  
 He recked not of the life he lost nor prize,  
 But where his rude hut, by the Danube lay,  
 There were his young barbarians all at play—

There was their Dacian mother—he, their sire,  
 Butchered to make a Roman holiday—  
 All this rushed with his blood—Shall he expire  
 And unrevenged? Arise, ye Goths, and glut your ire!"

A young pupil of Thorwaldsen, has recently surprised and delighted the admirers of genius at Rome, by a figure of a girl, holding a sea-shell to her ear, and listening with childlike wonder to the mysterious sounds of the ocean she seems to hear from within it. A more exquisite subject for the chisel can scarcely be imagined; and it is most unlikely that the young German ever read Wordsworth's *Excursion*, yet, in that most natural poem, we find the same thought.

"I have seen

A curious child, who dwelt upon a tract  
 Of inland ground, applying to his ear  
 The convolutions of a smooth-lipp'd shell,  
 To which, in silence hushed, his very soul  
 Listened intently; and his countenance soon  
 Brightened with joy; for murmurings from within  
 Were heard, sonorous cadences, whereby,  
 To his belief, the monitor expressed  
 Mysterious union with its native sea.  
 Even such a shell the universe itself  
 Is, to the ear of faith."

Here is a picture by a poet, the scenery of which a Claude should paint, and a Guido Reni put in the figure:

"As o'er the lake, in evening's glow,  
 The temple threw its lengthening shade  
 Upon the marble steps below,  
 There sat a fair Corinthian maid,  
 Gracefully o'er a volume bending;  
 While by her side a youthful sage  
 Held back her ringlets, lest, descending,  
 They should o'ershadow all the page."

I have not time for more instances, which are abundant. The coincidence between Art and Oratory, though equally striking, is more difficult of illustration; for the orator is ever pressing forward to his conclusion, and the pictures he presents to us, are moving, or he shifts scene after scene, as he follows thought with thought. Yet how fully does Massillon bring before us the Magdalene kneeling at the Saviour's feet, in the house of the Pharisee? What can be finer than the manner in which he contrasts the death of the sinner with that of the righteous person; how perfectly, with a painter's imagination, does he set off the lights of the one with the shadows of the other? But Massillon, in his *Life of Correggio*, proves how deep his sympathy with Art was. Barrow's description of the crucifixion, in his sermon on the passion of our Lord, might be studied by the Artist for a better picture than has ever been produced on the subject. Then, what noble illustrations of moral truth might be copied from portions of Burke's *Speeches in Parliament*? What force of

grouping and expression is there, when Anthony describes the death of Cæsar, as

“In his mantle muffling up his face,  
Even at the base of Pompey’s statue, which  
All the while ran blood, great Cæsar fell.”

But I need not detain you with further examples, to show that

“All they  
Whose intellect is an o’ermastering power,  
Which still recoils from its encumbering clay,  
Or lightens it to spirit, whatsoe’er  
The form which their creations may essay,  
Are kin; the kindled marble’s bust may wear  
More poesy upon its speaking brow,  
Than aught less than the Homeric page may bear.

One noble stroke with a whole life may glow,  
Or sanctify the canvass till it shine  
With beauty far surpassing all below,

\* \* \* \*

Transfused, transfigured; and the line  
Of poesy, which peoples but the air  
With thoughts and beings of the mind reflected,  
Can do no more.”

The people that can feel the glow and grandeur of thought, must feel Art, when there are productions worthy of the name.

The common opinion may be quoted against this argument, that Art flourishes best where popular superstitions, especially in religious mythology, supply subjects for the Artist’s illustration. That opinion is,

however, an error. The real merit and charm of Art is truth, and it can never derive a real advantage from falsity. It was not the god, the ancients admired in the Phidian Jupiter, but the dignity of conscious power. Venus was the *ideal* of voluptuous beauty, and Minerva of pure and harmonious wisdom. It is deep penitence, charmed by hope from its despair, that we see in the Magdalene; a mother's serene and holy joy in the Virgin Mary, showing her infant Jesus; and faith, struggling with mortal agony, in the dying Bartholomew. It is not the person, but the attributes, which move our souls.

But are there no subjects among us, which may be made the vehicles of such impressions? Would not the moral advantage of Art be far greater if illustrations of virtue were drawn from actual incidents, or presented in pure allegory? That change has taken place in poetry. We hear no more of Strephons and Phillises, in our pastorals; and a bard of our own day, who would invoke the "heavenly nine," or "Phœbe," or the "Golden-haired God of Day," would find them unable to propitiate us to a further reading. Why may not Art be stripped of unnatural envelopements? Our history, our daily lives are full of subjects for the painter's study;—the mother of Washington teaching her boy those sublime lessons, which, by the grace of God, made him "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen;" Patrick Henry, denouncing the tyranny of Britain, in the

Virginia council house; the patriot-mother arming her first-born for the doubtful conflict; the virgin, tearless in her lofty hope, sending her lover to the long campaign, and promising her livelong faith for no less reward than her country's freedom. Or, if you wish a presentment of venerable piety, holy benevolence and wisdom in meekness, bid the sculptor preserve in undying marble the patriarchal form of him, whom every sect acknowledged "a Father in God;" and who lingered so long among us, shedding his soft religion around like the mild rays of a summer's sunset, that he seemed like virtue which can never die, though heart and flesh must fail. It is a shame to us, as a religious community, that such a work remains to be done.\*

It is in employments like these Art must find her noblest office. No patriot, no moralist, no true lover of Art, should wish to see genius prostituted in producing nude and voluptuous figures, appealing to profligate pruriency for reward, and corrupting our morals in return. Such abuse has done more to prejudice the good against Art than all else beside. But such abuse is not a necessary consequence of its cultivation, any more than of the pen or the press, those mighty engines of social good, though vile men have often seduced them from their true purpose. Let it be your

\* The late Bishop White. Appendix (E.)

care, gentlemen Artists, to guard the fire of genius with vestal watchfulness.

There never was, I believe, a body of Artists in whom greater confidence can be reposed for this end, than those of our country. The time has gone by, when profligacy was excused as an eccentricity of genius; when talent had impunity in the breach of contracts, and envy and detraction made enemies of brothers in Art. You have proved to us that Artists, to deserve an entrance into your fraternity, must be gentlemen, to whom truth and honour and liberal feeling, are dearer even than fame itself. Your generous desire that no distinction in the national patronage should be made, between the native Artist and the foreigner resident among you, is a high example of philosophic freedom from petty jealousy, which might be imitated with advantage in some other quarters.\* Hold on your noble course. You shall reap the reward which virtue and genius deserve. You will ask no more. Trial is the lot of genius, as the fire which purifies; but the consciousness of high aims is an ever-present consolation. If I dared to assume such language, I might address you, as Wordsworth did the painter, Haydon :

“ High is our calling, friends, creative art  
 (Whether the instrument of words she use  
 Or pencil pregnant with ethereal hues)

\* Appendix (F.)



Demands the service of a mind and heart,  
 Though sensitive, yet in their weakest part  
 Heroically fashioned,—to infuse  
 Faith in the whispers of the lonely muse,  
 While the whole world seems adverse to desert.—  
 And oh! when nature sinks, as oft she may  
 Through long-lived pressure of obscure distress,  
 Still to be strenuous for the high reward,  
 And in the soul admit of no decay,  
 Brook no continuance of weak mindedness—  
 Great is the glory, for the strife is hard!"

Let me also intreat from you, a grateful veneration for that Divine Author and Benefactor of our being, who has surrounded us with so many objects of beauty and grandeur, and given us an eye and heart to enjoy the loveliness and magnificence of his works. Shall we feel the rapture He enkindles in our souls, and return no adoration and trust? Are not all his doings in nature intimations of Himself, faint shinings forth of that world of beauty, love, and truth, into which he will receive all who know Him here? If "an undevout astronomer be mad," so must be an infidel artist: for he lives among miracles, and owns no faith. Believe me, genius hath no school like Religion, no teacher like Christian Hope. No where but in that Book, whose author hath writ His name on nature, can we find such depths of tenderness, such loftiness of thought, such imaginations of glory, such purity of truth. Our calling here should ever be a preparation for immortality. Poor

will be the result of the most successful search after this world's honours, if, when life's last scene has shifted from before us, we are not permitted to hear the voice of the Redeemer saying, "Friend, come up higher." There is but one way that leads to that sublime rest, where the soul lives in the blessedness of her strength. There is but one portal through which we can pass to behold the face of God in love. It is the way of holy faith, fruitful in good works; the perfect merit of the Lamb of God. May that faith, and that inheritance, be given to us all!

## APPENDIX.

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(A.)

In no department of Art has there been a more rapid advance than in the application of water colours, for a few years past. The British Society of Water Colour Painters, have, in their several exhibitions, shown results surprising and delightful, which are but promises of yet more exquisite perfection. The cheapness and facility of this Art should recommend it to an increased attention in this country, as well calculated to enlarge and refine the general taste among us.

(B.)

Some allusion to the fact here stated, may be found in a very interesting address of our estimable fellow citizen, Mr. Thomas I. Wharton, before the Society for the Celebration of the Landing of William Penn, some years since. Mr. D. P. Brown has also treated it with his wonted spirit, in his letter to Lord Brougham.

(C.)

I have no doubt, but that a better knowledge than my own, would have suggested the names of not a few other of our native Artists as worthy of mention; and it is particularly pleasing to know, that there are those, yet young in years and Art, who bid fair to need no friendly herald to precede them in their way to well deserved fame.

## (D.)

The author would not condemn all shades of yellow in the painting of houses, but only the more *glaring* and the more *heavy*. There is a pale gentle yellow, (I use the term not with artistical niceness, but in its common sense,) which is very pleasing; but even red itself is almost as tolerable, as the vulgar gaudiness, or the dull deadness, with which some of our citizens have coated their buildings.

## (E.)

I am happy to learn that the subscription list to an engraving, now in progress by Wagstaff, of London, from Mr. Inman's admirable whole length of the good Bishop, shows a very general reverence and love for his memory, as it embraces the names of persons belonging to every religious denomination in this city. Some yet more durable and public monument should, however, be erected to commemorate such unusual worth. It is to be hoped, that the design talked of some years since, of a monumental statue in the vestibule of Christ's Church, may be revived. Few among us would refuse to contribute for the purpose, and we shall not soon have so fair an opportunity of securing a costly work of Art, which will do honour at once to the taste and the religious sentiment of our community. Inman's picture, (or the engraving from it,) will afford the sculptor the best authority, as it is considered by the family and friends of the Bishop, to be as remarkable for its truth of resemblance as for its power of execution.

## (F.)

I am happy to have here an opportunity of spreading before the public, the noble Memorial of the Artists of Philadelphia to the Congress of the United States, at the time when there was some hesitancy as to the propriety of giving the public patronage to any Artists not born among us. It is a paper full of philosophic truth and generous sentiment, and one which the opponent of all artificial restrictions upon industry and invention cannot appreciate too highly.

*To the Honourable the Senate and House of Representatives of the  
United States, in Congress assembled.*

The Memorial of "The Artists' Fund Society of Philadelphia," an institution conducted exclusively by Artists, and incorporated April 29, 1835, "for the purpose of advancing the happiness of their professional brethren, and of promoting the cultivation of skill, the diffusion of taste, and the encouragement of living professional talent in the Arts of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, and Engraving,"

**RESPECTFULLY REPRESENTS :**

That your memorialists have heard, with infinite pleasure, of a proposition made, or about to be made, before Congress, for the execution of sculptural decorations of the east front of the Capitol, at the seat of the National Government, in conformity with the requisitions of the original for the completion of that front; and they deem it not improper, as citizens of the United States, having an interest in all that relates to the Arts, to exercise a privilege, in common with other professions, of presenting, for the consideration of your honourable body, their views of what, in their opinion, may advance the public good, and contribute to elevate the character of those Arts which have always been the means of transmitting to posterity a knowledge of the state of refinement and intellectual standing of a people.

It is a gratifying evidence of the improvement of the times, that while the Useful Arts are most liberally encouraged throughout this vast Republic; while public buildings, canals, rail-roads, and manufactories are rapidly springing into existence, and human ingenuity and skill, in all departments of the Mechanic Arts, are stimulated to vigorous and renewed exertion, Congress has not forgotten to foster and encourage the Fine Arts.

The orders already given for a new device to our national coin; the intended decoration of the interior of our National Hall with paintings, and the exterior with sculpture, afford an honourable employment to our Artists; and, if well executed, will both promote their own excellence and advance the public taste.

Without meaning to institute invidious comparisons, or to dictate

to those upon whom the selection of an Artist for employment upon the Capitol devolves, your memorialists respectfully present to your notice the name of **LUGI PERSICO**, a sculptor, now in Washington, who both as an Artist and a man, is entitled to distinguished consideration.

Mr. Persico is an Italian by birth, and your memorialists are aware that many of their countrymen believe that none but natives are entitled to Government patronage: but your memorialists dissent from this doctrine, and entertain the opinion that Artists of genius and high moral character, whose works have a tendency to exalt the sentiments, and refine the manners of the age, should, upon the fair principles of competition, find an easy passport to employment in any part of the civilized world.

It would be a matter of regret, if our countrymen should be found less liberal than the people of other nations, in availing themselves of the skill of accomplished foreign Artists, whose merit is so often accompanied by valuable information and refined taste. The examples, in this respect, which have been set for us abroad, are worthy of emulation. We may point to the recent case of our gifted countryman West, whose name was rendered illustrious by the generous opportunities extended to him in a foreign land, for the development of his genius in the highest department of painting; who was honoured by the personal favours of the British monarch; and even when the fame of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the founder of the English school, was at its height, received the appointment of Historical Painter to the King. But the American Artist, in the true spirit of republican simplicity, rejected the royal proffer of knighthood, received a more honourable distinction—the presidential chair of the Royal Academy of Arts, given by the vote of the English Artists. Copley, too, an American, was honourably received and encouraged in England, as were our Leslie, our Newton, and others, who long since were acknowledged to be distinguished ornaments of the British school. Much might be said, likewise, of the liberal encouragement held out to foreigners upon the European continent: a striking instance of which is presented in Thorwaldsen, by birth a Swede, who was drawn from obscurity by the fostering care of foreign patronage, and is now the boast of the Italian school of sculpture. This may, possibly, be the

first petition which has reached your honourable body from a Society of Artists; but, unobtrusive as their profession may be, your memorialists gladly, in the present instance, avail themselves of their constitutional privilege, to present to you their decided conviction, that, to give an intellectual character to the Arts of a country, they must be advanced to that standard by the impulse of unrestricted competition and generous patronage, and that regard should be had to no other qualifications but those of merit; and that an equal influence should be shed upon all who reside among us, whether their birth-place be in this or in another land. Therefore, dismissing every narrow jealousy and contracting prejudice, it is with pride that your memorialists—the greater part of whom are native citizens—advance this doctrine, which they firmly believe involves the welfare of the Arts of their beloved country.

Your memorialists, in conclusion, respectfully pray that your honourable body will allow to Mr. Persico's merits the weight to which they are justly entitled, and that you will adopt such measures as your wisdom may dictate in favour of the object of this Memorial.

By order of the Artists' Fund Society.

JOHN NEAGLE, *President.*

THOMAS B. ASHTON, *Secretary.*

Philadelphia, February 1, 1837.

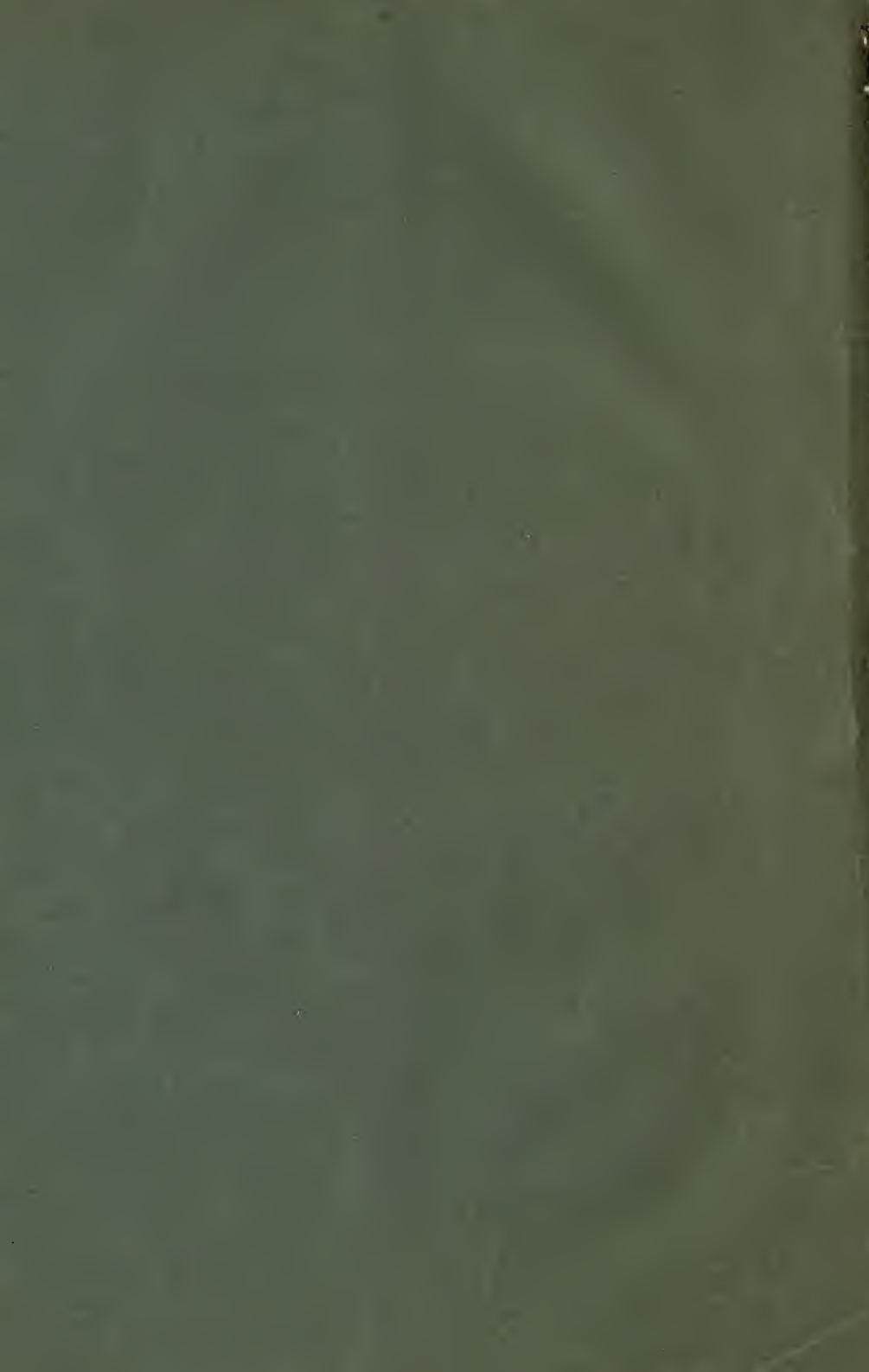














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